

...Modern "old hands" created a colorful hubbub at the Union Pacific station in Omaha in the late 1860's, right.

the animals to the railroads. A favorite route led along the Chisholm Trail, which ran from the Mexican border through Austin and Waco, Tex., to Abilene, Kan. Farther west, the Western Trail led to Dodge City, Kan. Millions of cattle plodded along these trails, sometimes as many as 4,000 in a single drive.

The open range did not last long. By 1885, overstocking had ruined many ranchers. They had bought more cattle than the land could support. Fierce blizzards in the winter of 1886-1887 spelled the end for many more. Sheep raisers began moving into the Plains. Their herds cropped the grass so short that cattle could not graze the land. Farmers built fences on the open range, limiting the amount of pastureland. Ranchers tried to keep out *nesters*, or permanent settlers, in a series of *range wars*. But the open range had disappeared, and the cattle boom came to an end.

Homesteading on the Plains. New developments in the 1870's made it possible for eager settlers to farm the grasslands. Barbed wire, invented in 1873, provided the first cheap substitute for wood fences. Windmills solved the problem of bringing up water that lay far underground. Agricultural experts worked out methods of farming that would work in the dry climate (see DRY FARMING). With improved machinery, farmers could cultivate large areas. The railroads offered cheap land to homesteaders. Thousands of settlers moved into Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. The government opened a large section of Indian Territory in 1889, and the Oklahoma Territory was born (see INDIAN TERRITORY). So much of the Far West had filled up by 1890 that the Bureau of the Census declared in a report that a definite frontier no longer existed.

Life on the Frontier

The People of the western frontier formed a varied mixture. Americans streamed west from the East Coast, the Middle West, and the South. Some who had committed crimes went west because they wanted to get as far away from the law as possible. Others found life boring in the East, and wanted to try something new and different. Professional people and merchants cared for the needs of growing communities. Land speculators hoped to make quick fortunes. But most settlers were farmers, laborers, unskilled mechanics, miners, and former soldiers. They wanted to get rich in a hurry, and were willing to risk their lives to do it.

Large numbers of blacks moved to the frontier to escape the prejudice they had experienced in the East and South. Thousands of black homesteaders settled in California, Kansas, Nebraska, and Texas during the second half of the 1800's. Some of the best-known cowboys of that period were blacks. One, a ranch hand named Nat Love, gained fame for horsemanship and other skills on cattle drives. Bose Ikard, a former slave, was foreman of one of the largest ranches in Texas. Black soldiers in the U.S. Army fought Indians on the frontier. See BLACK AMERICANS (After Reconstruction).

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SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

Many other groups also lived in the Far West. Mexicans and Californians had settled in the Southwest and California since the 1700's. Indians furnished cheap labor. Basques from France and Spain worked as sheepherders (see BASQUES). Scandinavians and other Europeans bought farms on the Great Plains. Missionaries came from England and Wales to join the search for precious metals. Chinese came to build the railroads, then drifted to mining camps where they ran laundries, restaurants, and small shops.

Most frontier people fell into two classes, *solid folk* and *boomers*. The solid folk settled down if they liked life, or went home if they did not. Boomers were always heading for a new boom town. They seldom stayed long enough to make much money, and squandered their earnings in high living. Even among the steady people, few persons came to stay, as settlers had stayed on land east of the Missouri River. Most of them wanted to get rich and go home.

The frontier was a man's world, and favored jack-of-all-trades. Wyatt Earp served as a marshal, sheriff, buffalo hunter, stagecoach driver, and prospector. Hank Monk, a famous stagecoach driver, was a miner, and rode the pony express. George Jackson, credited with discovering gold in the Rockies, had been a sheepherder, prospector, farm hand, miner, and roper, and later became a businessman.

Food on the frontier was usually simple. Flour served as the basic food, because it was nourishing and did not spoil. The people used it in sourdough biscuits and bread, and in *flapjacks*, or pancakes. Other imports